

Grassroots Vaccination Campaign: A Major Success Challenge

The City of El Alto in Bolivia has become a focal point for social and political unrest. Much of the discontent arises from poor living conditions, low incomes, and inadequate social services. For example, recent surveys indicated that only 68% of children under one year of age in El Alto had received the third required dose of a vaccine to protect them against pertussis, tetanus, polio, hepatitis B, and Hemophilus influenza B meningitis.



Photo: USAID/Bolivia

Despite the civil and political strife that recently engulfed El Alto, municipal leaders, health professionals, and community members rallied in support of a successful childhood vaccination campaign, in partnership with Ministry of Health, USAID, and Pan-American Health Organization.

Results

Through this unique collaborative effort between the central Ministry of Health and municipal officials, over 240 people were organized into teams of vaccinators. During the intensive campaign held December 4–15, 2003, over 5,000 children were immunized with first, second, or third doses of the vaccine. The overall rate of children fully immunized, as measured by those receiving their third dose, reached 81%.

This campaign demonstrates how effective a collaborative approach to public health challenges can be - even in an impoverished, conflicted community. Grassroots participation and promotion of childhood immunization create tangible results in terms of higher vaccination rates.

Initiative

USAID approached the Ministry of Health, municipal leaders of El Alto, and coordinators of the local health service networks to discuss strategies to address the low level of vaccine coverage. The National Immunization Program Director in Bolivia worked with USAID to implement a door-to-door vaccination campaign for children under one-year-old.

Neighborhood committees throughout El Alto activated grassroots networks of “manzaneras” - local women nominated by their communities - to conduct health outreach work. With special training, these volunteers traveled from house to house to educate and inform parents about the vaccination.